



# Put Your Financial Identity on Ice with a Credit Freeze

**Release Date:** October 9, 2014

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MADISON – It's an unfortunate modern reality: data breaches at major companies have become commonplace and it is a safe bet that there are many more to come. Consumers who use a credit or debit card or who provide personal information to businesses can expect to be involved in a future data breach, if they haven't already. But a data breach doesn't have to ruin your credit and your good name. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) advises consumers concerned about identity theft and data breaches to consider placing a security freeze on their credit reports.

"A security freeze is a tool that allows you to restrict access to your credit reports, which in turn makes it more difficult for identity thieves to open new accounts in your name," said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. "A security freeze won't stop a thief from making charges to existing accounts, so consumers should also monitor credit reports and monthly statements, looking for unauthorized accounts or charges."

Placing a security freeze prohibits the release of information on a consumer's credit report unless the consumer provides express authorization, with limited exceptions. Because creditors want to see your credit report before opening new credit, the security freeze reduces the likelihood that an account will be opened without your knowledge.

A security freeze allows consumers to use existing lines of credit and will not impact your credit score. You can temporarily lift the freeze if you need to open a new line of credit, and you can remove the freeze at any time.

To freeze your credit, contact the three major credit bureaus in writing. There is a \$10 fee to each bureau for placing the freeze, but identity theft victims with a police record of the theft can have the fees waived. Temporary lifts are an additional \$10 fee from each bureau, and it is free to remove the freeze. A DATCP fact sheet with additional instructions and a sample freeze request letter is available for download at:

<http://datcp.wi.gov/uploads/Consumer/pdf/IDTheftCreditFreezeFAQ632.pdf>

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at [datcp.wisconsin.gov](http://datcp.wisconsin.gov), call the Consumer Information Hotline at 800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to [datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov](mailto:datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov).

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